

# Guardian Program Takes A Special Kind Of Volunteer

BY SUSAN USHER

The needlework hung over Betty Buck's desk in the Brunswick County Courthouse carries the simple message, "Try A Little Kindness."

And in their work with abused, neglected and dependent children, that's exactly what Mrs. Buck and her small corps of seven Guardian ad Litem program volunteers do.

The main ability needed to become a GAL volunteer is the ability to relate to other people, especially children, the part-time program coordinator said. The volunteers serve literally as "guardians at law" for the children assigned them, making sure that their interests, needs and feelings are heard as their futures are decided for them in juvenile court.

A GAL volunteer is assigned any time a petition is filed with the court by an agency alleging that a child has been a victim of child abuse or neglect. His or her job is to speak up for the child and to represent the child through litigation. The agency is one of several involved in dispensation of the case in court, but is the only one whose purpose is to make sure that the child's wishes are expressed and that the child's best interests are addressed by the court and other agencies.

Last year the program handled 18 cases that involved 32 children. "We had some cases we were real happy with," said Mrs. Buck. These included several where the case was terminated when children were successfully reunited with their own, more stable families, and other cases where children were placed in new, permanent homes.

As guardians ad litem the volunteers are sworn officers of the court, having first completed 12 hours of classroom training and four hours of observation in court. Part of a statewide program begun in 1983 by the N.C. Administrative Office of the Courts, GAL volunteers independently investigate each case — from the child's point of view. They interview the child and key people in the child's life and collect and examine records from various sources. They may do follow-ups to make sure court orders are carried out, or they may appeal a court order or petition to terminate parental rights, then participate in the placement court review afterwards.

Based on the information collected and working closely with Mrs.

*"It gives you . . . a good feeling; it's hard to explain—How do you feel when you help a kid?"*

—Gray "Cappy" Capps  
GAL Volunteer

Buck and with Rob Serra, the program's attorney advocate, they report to the court and make recommendations regarding the child's care, service treatment, security and placement. In court they may also protect the child from insensitive questions and the often harmful effects of involvement in an adversarial court process.

"Our volunteers do an excellent job," said Buck, who volunteers with the program in addition to her 20 paid hours of service each week, taking all cases for which no other volunteer is available.

"They visit the children and go out into the community and gather information. Lots of times they serve as a friend to the parents, to help them get back on the road."

Sometimes the program's viewpoint is in harmony with those of other agencies involved in a case, sometimes not. "Then we go it alone," said Mrs. Buck, her smiling face showing a strong streak of determination. "It takes a special kind of person to be a guardian ad litem," she said.

During the last three months of 1989, local guardians ad litem logged more than 350 hours in case-work, training or in court.

One of those volunteers was Gray "Cappy" Capps, a senior citizen from Shallotte Point. Capps won a "one-on-one" award last year from the Brunswick County Volunteer and Information Center, logging more than 500 hours of service since joining the GAL program in 1988.

Capps is still going strong. He's worked with nine or 10 children already, and speaks fondly of the successes and with concern about the cases that aren't going so well.

"I would like to say they help me," he said of the children with whom he works so closely. "I have the time available and it gives you an internal feeling—a good feeling—of having helped someone."

"It's hard to explain," he continued, turning to Mrs. Buck. "How do you explain how you feel when you help a kid?"

"If you ever see a kid come from a broken home with drugs, alcohol, abuse, a baby with fetal-alcohol syndrome, and see that baby a year later in circumstances turned around for the better..."

The program offers plenty of joyous moments and rewards of a special kind. But, Capps said, "You have your heart-breaking moments also. We have one child when he goes to bed tonight he doesn't know where he will eat breakfast tomorrow. Some of these kids have been through hell."

But as the volunteers try to make sure that kind of situation doesn't happen again, the program's success stories keep them going.

"The judges do listen to us," said Capps. "I think we do carry a little weight and make a difference."

Capps wishes more people in the county would take notice of what's going on around them and report instances of child abuse or neglect to the Brunswick County Department of Social Services. The GAL offices gets calls describing such instances, but can't get involved until the situation is formally reported and a petition filed with the courts.

Meanwhile, while Mrs. Buck looks for more volunteers like Capps—caring, responsible, adults—he keeps volunteering long hours, helping kids in trouble.

"My childhood wasn't the best," he recalled. "I've always prayed that if I can help one child not live a childhood like I had that my time on earth would be well spent."

He stays alert to calls for help; Capps is convinced that while he may have already helped lots of young people, that a special child will some day need him.

"I've still got to find 'my' kid," said Capps. "The child I was meant to help."

The Guardian ad Litem programs expect to hold a volunteer training program sometime in February. Interested persons are asked to call Mrs. Buck at 253-4060.



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER  
GUARDIAN AD LITEM Gray "Cappy" Capps shares recollections of past cases with program coordinator Betty Buck. Capps says his volunteer work with the program is rewarding, because he likes "helping kids."

## Degree Of Plant Injury Uncertain

BY WILLIAM BARROW JR.  
Agricultural Extension Agent  
The weather during the Christmas holiday helped many of us realize what our northern neighbors

deal with on a regular basis. We often brush off the severity of a winter storm when someone else experiences it and think they are more prepared than us to handle it. I'm not sure if they can handle it better, but my hat's off to them since they have to do it on a more regular basis.

Many people have asked about their plants and what kind of injury they sustained. We really can't give that question a full answer until spring arrives and plants begin to bud. But there are a few observations we can make.

First, there are a number of brown leaves on any plant that was exposed. This is a result of high transpiration rates enhanced by the high winds and bright sun, and the severe cold temperatures. Bright sun and a constant wind tend to increase the rate of moisture that is lost or transpired into the atmosphere. Those leaves exposed could not keep up with the increased demand and were freeze dried. Most, if not all, of these leaves will fall.

However, there does not appear to be heavy damage to the plant itself. Generally the stems are green and alive. We will have to

### GARDENING TIPS

wait and see if the buds survive.

Those plants covered with snow show little injury. This is a major difference from the cold experienced in 1983. Then we did not have snow and whole plants were killed.

In addition to the brown leaves, look for areas around the base of the plant where the bark may have been split vertically. Generally, the freezing and thawing will cause this on some plants, particularly in areas where there is a lot of moisture. Plants affected may not show symptoms until the summer, when

long dry spells stress them for water.

Overall, the damage from this winter storm appears less than experienced in 1983, but we will have to wait and see. In the coming weeks, I will give some tips on how to handle specific plants.

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### PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

#### On Appalachian Dean's List

Mary Ann McLamb of Shallotte and Diana Marie Turner of Calabash are the only two students from Brunswick County who qualified for the fall 1989 semester dean's list at Appalachian State University at Boone.

Students must attain a 3.25 grade point average on a 4.0 scale to qualify for dean's list and carry at least 12 hours of academic credit during the semester.

Miss McLamb is a sophomore majoring in biology, and Miss Turner is a freshman who has not declared a major field of study.

#### Completes Training

Army National Guard Private James H. Grissett has completed training at the U.S. Army Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga. A 1989 graduate of West Brunswick High School, he is the son of Malcolm and Brenda Grissett of Route 7, Shallotte.

During the course, students received training which qualified them as light weapons infantrymen and as indirect fire crewmen in a rifle or mortar squad. Instruction included weapons qualifications, tactics, patrolling, land mine warfare, field communications and combat operations.

#### Conrad Chosen

Karen L. Conrad, a senior at Old Dominion University, has been selected as a new member of Outstanding College Students of America.

A resident of Hampton, Va., she

is the grandchild of George and Helen Conrad of Briarwood Estates, Shallotte. A social science and political science major, she will graduate magna cum laude in May.

#### Scholarships Awarded

The Union High School Alumni Association has selected two area students to receive its first scholarships. They are DeAndre Gause and LaShonda Grissett, both 1989 graduates of West Brunswick High School. Each will receive a \$500 scholarship.

Miss Gause is studying at UNC-Charlotte and Miss Grissett at Fayetteville State University.

#### Etheridge To Talk At Ribbon Cutting

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Bob Etheridge was to be the guest speaker today (Thursday) at an 8:30 a.m. breakfast and ribbon cutting ceremony held by the Brunswick County Board of Education to mark the official opening of the new addition at South Brunswick High School.

Bill Turner, assistant superintendent for transportation and maintenance with Brunswick County Schools, said workers completed the \$1.5 million project in December.

New classrooms, administrative offices, an art room and band room were constructed at the high school. The project took nearly a year to complete.

*The Brunswick Hospital expresses our sincere thanks to the following people who helped transport staff to and from the hospital during the "White Christmas of 1989."*

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